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SUBJECT: EASTERN DRC NOTES - DECEMBER 24

¶1. (U) The items contained in this report consist principally of spot information from various sources. This report is not exhaustive, nor can all the information contained therein be confirmed at this time.

Note: Due to seasonal holidays, our next report will appear on December 29. End note.

Security Situation

¶2. (SBU) Agence France Press reported that the CNDP has complained that FARDC troops have moved within 100 meters of CNDP positions on the Goma-Rutshuru road, just north of Goma. MONUC acknowledged the report, but its military briefers are unaware of any significant changes in FARDC positions. The UNDSS December 24 briefing noted that the CNDP was apparently building up its forces in the area, near Kibati. (Note and Comment: At the conclusion of the most recent talks in Nairobi, the CNDP refused to sign a document committing to prolonging the cease-fire. The CNDP based its refusal on claims that the FARDC was moving into neutral zones from which the CNDP had withdrawn. Neither post nor the Goma Office have seen any indication from MONUC, which monitors changes in positions closely, that this is the case. End note and comment.)

¶3. (SBU) FDLR troops allegedly looted Kiribizi, a small town north of Nyanzale in Rutshuru territory. The FDLR inexplicably fled, leaving weapons behind, which MONUC confiscated.

¶4. (SBU) MONUC has received an increasing number of reports of CNDP clashes with PARECO/Mai Mai forces on the northern and western edges of CNDP-held territory over the past three days. Mai Mai militias south of Kanyabayonga have acquired more weapons and continue to maintain pressure on the CNDP in this area. On the other hand, according to MONUC, FDLR forces seldom engage the CNDP directly and often withdraw when confronted rather than fight.

¶5. (SBU) Mai Mai forces reportedly shot at a South African MONUC patrol over the weekend near Pinga, northwest of Masisi, with no casualties. In response, MONUC plans to bolster its presence and visibility in the area to demonstrate that the Mai Mai cannot impede MONUC access to areas. MONUC also plans to deploy helicopter gunship patrols in the vicinity of Kanyabayonga.

¶6. (SBU) OCHA has strongly advised NGO's to avoid the Sake-Masisi road, stressing that the road, which is under repairs, is dangerous from the point of road accidents, as well as ambushes from armed bandits. MONUC and the national police are increasing patrols in Goma during the holiday period.

LRA - Operation Lightning Thunder

¶7. (SBU) MONUC noted that the UPDF had finished its first phase of operations, consisting primarily of air attacks, against the LRA.

There are some unverified reports that Kony was still in Garamba Park as recently as December 20, raising some doubts as to whether he has fled to the CAR.

¶18. (U) At a December 23 press conference in Paris, DRC Foreign Minister Alexis Thambwe Mwamba said that joint operations against the LRA were proceeding well. He added that the GDRC expected to be "totally rid of Mr. Kony's militia within days."

MONUC on the New Mandate

¶19. (SBU) MONUC Forward Force Chief of Staff Lieutenant Colonel James Cunliffe noted that the new UNSCR stresses MONUC's mandate to protect civilians, as well as to act against the FARDC, if its troops threaten civilians. Privately, Cunliffe confided to Goma Poloff his frustration with the protection mandate, maintaining that "protection" implied a range of social services beyond the capabilities of a military mission. Cunliffe said he was seeking more specific guidance from MONUC Kinshasa on how to implement the new mandate. He opined that enhancing protection of IDP camps appeared to be a logical place to start. However, he noted that the vast majority of IDP's in CNDP territory did not live in camps, which the CNDP had dismantled in an attempt to coax the population back to their homes. (Comment: Elevating "protection" is not an impossible task, as Cunliffe insinuates. MONUC could indeed do more, e.g., improving community outreach and focusing on enhancing perimeter security around camps. At the same time, MONUC forces on the ground will need more clear definition of what "protection" entails. End Comment.)

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¶10. (U) The GDRC Communications Minister and Spokesman, Lambert Mende praised the new MONUC mandate, including the possibility that MONUC would engage FARDC elements guilty of exactions against the civilian population. Mende added that "the problem of out-of-control FARDC elements was a concern at the highest levels of the GDRC."

Humanitarian Situation

¶11. (SBU) MONUC is working with OCHA to identify and map IDP camps throughout North Kivu. According to OCHA, there are only 10 "official" IDP camps in the province, mostly around Goma and Masisi. There are dozens of other unofficial camps, which have sprung up as civilians fled their homes for safer areas. OHCA remains hesitant to fully recognize these camps, since many people return home when the situation improves.

¶12. (SBU) According to UNDSS, the CNDP has sent OHCA a letter requesting a list of legitimate humanitarian organizations operating in CNDP-controlled territory. OCHA intends to respond that responsibility for NGO registration resides with the appropriate GDRC ministries. OCHA will not facilitate a parallel registration by the CNDP.

GARVELINK